December 73

(Hector)

pp. 2 - 5 Sleeping Lord (working on)
Balaam's Ass, origin

(arrive back from
England after hospital
David in 'battalion
nucleus'

Passchendaele — D in
38th Div. in opening of attack.

①

Die IOVIS a.d. II Idus DEC.
anno ab INCARNATIONE
Xti.
MCMLXXIII

Dearest René

Thank you so very much for yr letter that I received this A.M. I owe you at least five letters It is horrible the way in which one fails to write to the people one most thinks about & whose presence one misses most.

I am sorry you've worried about my abscess. It started up about five weeks back & in a most awkward part of the body in the ~~r~~ left thigh just where the thigh meets the buttock, and after a week about of hot lint to try and burst it, the doctor took me to the hospital ~~almost~~ (almost next door to this Nursing Home) to exray the thing & then to lance it, under ~~anesthetic~~ anaesthetic, for he had to go pretty deep. cut clean it. Then when I came back here it has to be kept open & dressings put on it. They dressed it this morning & said it was OK. – I think all things like ~~ab~~ abscesses make one feel pretty weak & wretched, and I had not been up to much for a week before it started up – it ~~was~~ appears it was only a kind of cist to begin with.

Enough of this boring matter. I hope it is finished now.

First I wanted to say how splendid your *Death of Hector* is. It's superb & exceedingly moving to read

None of this letter has been read through so forgive probable errors & what makes no sense. D.

Xtopher Skelton brought me a copy – I think he was just going over to see you in Éire.

The lettering was also terribly good – I simply can't imagine how you make it without endless alterations. But I understand you just do it straight off like writing a letter. It would take me weeks to make it & endless adjustments to get the feel I wanted. I am afraid I cannot say I like the illustrations*; they are not worthy of your splendid transliteration of Homer's text. But it would take very great artistry indeed to manage that. It has that same 'authenticity' & freshness as your Chanson de Roland has.

*but don't tell the artist that for it would only ~~[illegible]~~ hurt his feelings & I know you like him – I've met only his wife, Kate Cantley (?) is it, & ~~state~~ she is a remarkable girl.

Glad they sent you a copy of the issue of Anglo-Welsh review. He's a nice bloke Roland Mathias the editor & has given all he could to keep that little magazine going – and I've met him only once sometime this summer for he hardly ever comes to London (very wisely) but works away in Brecon.

I'm very delighted that you liked The Narrows for I feared it had somehow misfired. – I made it especially for that issue of the A-W Review because he, the editor, especially wanted me to let him have something and I was working on some stuff that is to be published by Fabers under the editorship of William Cookson of Agenda. In fact it will contain all those various bits & pieces of mine that were in Agenda and is called The Sleeping Lord and other fragments & also I've included some stuff that I made immediately after In Parenthesis was more or less finished made partly at Sidmouth & Hartland Point & in that 'cottage' on the Stanmore estate where Prudence & Lady Chetwode lived & I was going to have called it The Book of Balaam's Ass but I abandoned the project as it would not come together, 3

Sat. Dec. 15 morning to continue, I found one section
that I thought would ~~go with~~ might do,
It's about 'about' a later phase of the war
& ~~chat~~ a rembered conversation of the immediate
post-war years. 1919–20 or so. Anyway with a bit
of ~~[illegible]~~ work it would serve. It's about
that 1917 trench war north of the Ypres Salient
for after my getting wounded in Mametz Wood
~~in~~ the 10th of July or more accurately the small hours
of July 11. I was evacuated across the Narrows
& after nearly four months returned to the
West Front and found my ~~[illegible]~~ battalion
indeed the whole 38th Devision ~~[illegible]~~ was occupying
~~the line~~ the most northerly bit of the British
Front north west of Ypres – Having no map with
me here I can't explain exactly the position
we held, but it was mainly along the ~~Yser~~
Yser Canal with dugouts using the south bank
of the canal & ~~their~~ ~~their~~ they opened on to
a road with trees on either side in the
usual French manner, but between the
road & the dugout entrances, there ran
a little stream that we called the
Yser Lea across which were planks of
wood with 'rustic' hand-rails here &
there I suppose I rember them because
they were were so humane when ~~[illegible]~~
~~with~~ contrasted to their setting.
in that most uninviting of areas
~~Sectors~~ There is a passage in
Chaucer about the palace of Mars
that I felt & feel, his words
best description of it.
The Devision ~~[illegible]~~ occupied this
bit of front for the exceptionally
long period of virtually a year.
that is from sometime in Oct. 1916
to Sept. 1917. I arrived back
from England a little before
my twenty-first birthday on Nov 1st
and during my period
we spent virtually all the months
consolidating ~~&~~ or repairing &
extending the trenches, or rather the
trench system. New communication
trenches – one I recall was a
very solid affair of carpentered
revetting frames and in general
making the place a formidable

defensive position – ~~[illegible]~~ I recall seeing dumps of artillery ammunition that ordinarily would be ~~[illegible]~~ more out of sight of enemy observation – but of course all this ~~labour~~ continued labour was in preparation for the British Offensive that was launched at the end of July or August 1st 1917 & which was destined to continue until sometime in November 1917 under indescribable conditions and enormous casualties.

The 38th ~~Division~~ (Welsh) Division with ~~the~~ its numbers of labour companies of Welsh miners from the mining valleys of South-east Wales were obviously of great use in all ~~this~~ these building-up period and it has been suggested ~~that~~ by some that the reason or part reason for the Devisions prolonged stay in that one sector – but for various I should doubt if that ~~was~~ decided G.H.Q in this matter. However that may be, after we had been engaged for ~~[illegible]~~ nearly a year in this building up of the line in this sector we were withdrawn to another sector away to the south of Armentieres in Septeber '17 But the Devision was involved in the first phase of the offensive, ~~its~~ the objective ~~to~~ being Pilkem Ridge in the first days of August. From what little I saw of that advance, I can't speak of the incredible nature of the warfare in the months to come but I saw enough to guess something of the ~~assaults~~ asaults over a terrain of churned up mud, ~~water~~ ~~[illegible]~~ water brimming ~~such~~ shell-craters, not a yard of 'dead ground' not a fold of earth the length ~~of~~ y'r body and sighted with his usual ~~accuracy~~ accuracy his sweep of fire from narrow slits of concrete pill-boxes covering all the approaches, & heavy ~~mortar~~ mortars operating from behind each stark ridge.

As I say above I can speak ~~contactually~~ contactually only of the first ~~[illegible]~~ day or two, in late July or early August and even then

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hardly in the thick of it, for I was posted to a reserve group*; but no one present at all in that ~~terrain~~ of battle could fail to ~~[illegible]~~ feel the land bereft of ~~its~~ natural foliage and given over wholly to the desert of war could altogether forget its feeling – the rain also made matters worse ~~and~~ by October one can well believe (what I was told later) ~~that~~ men were literally drowned in liquid mud.

Those of us of my unit ~~that~~ who had been in the ~~[illegible]~~ contest in the woods of the Somme in July 1916 felt the great change that 'mechanisation' in one form or another had unconsciously changed things quite a bit. Some, by a chance give-away word betrayed their feelings, their 'instress' that they ~~[illegible]~~ would, if they could, ~~recall~~ bring back that sylvan terrain where so many Agamemnons had cried ~~also~~ aloud –

No 'Queen of the Woods' to crown with varied ~~flowery~~ flowers; that shit, Major Lillywhite, wouldn't have his ~~[illegible]~~ daisies & Balder with Goronwy – no violets for them – but still the Regina Coeli & ~~[illegible]~~ mundi Domina as Villon says ~~[illegible]~~ is also imperatrix of the infernal marsh, ~~[illegible]~~ and ~~[illegible]~~ if ever there was a desolated swamp it was those drenched flats & ridges called Paschendaele. I suppose it

the ~~name~~ site-name that made it so famed a hell in the memory of soldiers & civvies alike ~~in~~ the post-war years.

But enough of this. I wanted only to say how sorry I was that I had not written sooner. Thank you dear René for all your letters. You are every day in my thoughts.

I'm fairly cast down in that I can not see ~~[illegible]~~ light for the further side of my wood. I mean here I am stuck trying to do what I can on bits of writing but with nearly all my books etc still at my dugout in Monksdene ~~and~~ & still requiring attention of a Nursing Home. I had no idea when I first had that stroke & then the fall that I would be here three years later. I'm not complaining for they are awfully kind & considerate. But I ~~imagined~~ imagined it would a six or nine months of invalidishness not virtually permanent.

About the articles in *The Anglo Welsh Review* I hope you will like David Blamires *Roma Aurea Roma*. I remember you did not much like his book, but as with his article in *Agenda* called *The Ordered Wood*, so, I think with this *Roma Aurea Roma*, he shows

* I think it was called 'Battalion ~~nucleus~~ nucleus'; As casualties mounted ~~up~~ & mounted G.H.Q. formed groups of Battalion ~~[illegible]~~ ~~nuclei~~ nuclei round which new ~~[illegible]~~ ~~[illegible]~~ could be formed so that the life of the battalion or unit ~~would~~ ~~[illegible]~~ & retain its identity & its life would not be wholly extinguished.

considerable perception. I especially liked his reference ~~in~~ *The Ana* to Tiberius Gracchus weeping for the waste land, for I wished in writing the line that chaps would see that I meant an actual connection between Gracchus attempt to restore the older Roman virtue of chaps tending their own furrows & pasture with the waste land theme. I've felt that the Gracchian [illegible] could never prevail [illegible] when it become [illegible] clear to the big [illegible] wealthy powerful figures who held vast estates.

I also thought Jeremy Hooker piece on *The Anathemata* was very good, but did not feel Philip Pacey on Paul Nash's painting in relation to my writing came off for some reason. & don't know about Peter Stevens on *D.J. & his 'bits of lettering'*. There is something of interest in it, but I don't know what the conclusion was.

Must shut up now. Awfully sorry you were concerned about my beastly abscess — it was a brute of a thing "a great big knashing bounder" of an abscess in fact. The doctor had to cut very deep — I hope he got to the root of the thing. It was in *exactly* the same spot as I had trouble there nine years ago. But that was nothing compared with this thing & did not require anesthic to remove.

Hope you are alright René
much love to Joan
and of course to yourself
& many many thanks for
everything. God bless you always
David.

P.S. [illegible] time
Tom just come —. & now I've just broken one of my front teeth — & it's a Saturday night. How they pile it on.
D.